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PUBLIC HEALTH, DIET, NUTRITION AND PREVENTION

Analysis for Biotechnology Innovations Using Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

**Nicholas A. Linacre, Joanne Gaskell, Mark W. Rosegrant, Jose Falck-Zepeda, Hector Quemada, Mark Halsey, and Regina Birner, Discussion Paper No. 140 Abstract
INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE August 2005**

Meeting the food needs of the world's growing population while reducing poverty and protecting the environment is a major global challenge. Genetically modified crops appear to provide a promising option to deal with this challenge. However there is a need to make strategic decisions on how to spend limited agricultural research funds in order to achieve a maximum impact with regard to finding sustainable solutions to end hunger and poverty. In international development institutions, there is growing interest in the potential use of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as part of a research based Environmental Management System (EMS) to promote mainstreaming of environmental considerations in policy development. SEA was developed as an approach to integrate environmental considerations at a policy level, where alternative environmental policies can be evaluated.

In this paper, we propose using SEA in a policy research and priority setting process regarding new technologies, taking the development of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) as an example. We propose that this method would be a useful tool for the international agricultural research centers of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), streamlining business processes, strengthening accountability, sharpening the research agenda it supports, fostering broader partnerships, and increasing the relevance and impact of CGIAR research in achieving international development goals. Currently international law requires only Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) of specific biotechnology projects. The incorporation of environmental considerations only at the level of specific projects precludes the adoption of alternative environmental policies. In this review, we outline an SEA approach currently being considered at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) for use in evaluating biotechnology policies. SEA may be a useful tool to inform the evaluation of biotechnology policies and priorities by taking account of information on the economic, social, and environmental benefits, cost and risks of adopting those policies.

Full text: <http://www.ifpri.org/divs/eptd/dp/papers/eptdp140.pdf>

Does the Collaborative Model Improve Care for Chronic Heart Failure?

Steven M. Asch, et.al.

RAND August 2005

Conclusions: Organizational participation in a common disease-targeted collaborative provider interaction improved a wide range of processes of care for CHF, including both medical therapeutics

and education and counseling. Our data support the use of programs like the IHI BTS in improving the processes of care for patients with chronic diseases.

<http://www.rand.org/publications/RP/RP1173/>

Improving Maternal and Child Health Care; A Blueprint for Community Action in the Pittsburgh Region

Harold Alan Pincus, et.al.

RAND, August 2005

An overview of a family-centered, community-based approach to improving the maternal and child health care system in the Pittsburgh region. Based on a review of best practices in maternal and child health care and an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, and barriers to improvement in the current system, targets for local policy reform are identified and a vision, strategy, and action plan for achieving systemwide improvements in maternal and child health care processes and outcomes are outlined.

<http://www.rand.org/publications/MG/MG225/>

RAND Study Identifies Ways To Cut Deaths And Illness Among Mothers And Young Children In Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

RAND News Release, August 3, 2005

The illness and death rates of mothers and their young children in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, can be reduced with more coordinated care and increased family involvement, according to a RAND Corporation study issued today.

“Our primary objective is to stay focused on treating the whole family, not just the individual,” said Estelle Richman, secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, who spoke at the news conference in Pittsburgh announcing the study. “The sooner we learn this lesson, the less the need will be for treatment and intervention down the road, and the better will be the lives of our young children and parents. Coordinating our efforts to ensure we maximize our impact is always a complex proposition; but, if we do not, mothers and children are the ones who will continuously suffer.”

The study titled “*Improving Maternal and Child Health Care: A Blueprint for Community Action in the Pittsburgh Region*” calls for an action plan to help mothers and their children age 5 and younger by: Promoting healthy lifestyles and positive health outcomes.

- Reducing preventable disease and environmental health risks.
- Ensuring access to quality health care and social services for all groups.

<http://www.rand.org/news/press.05/08.03.html>

Teen Smokers Develop Big Bellies
Daily News Central 02 August, 2005

Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke have been linked to metabolic syndrome in teenagers. Exposure to cigarette smoke raises the risk among teens of metabolic syndrome, a disorder associated with excess belly fat that increases the chances of heart disease, stroke and diabetes, according to a study.

Researchers said it is the first study to establish such a link in teenagers.

"The bottom line to me is: As we gear up to take on this epidemic of obesity, we cannot abandon protecting our children from secondhand smoke and smoking," said lead author Dr. Michael Weitzman, executive director of the American Academy of Pediatrics Center for Child Health Research in Rochester, N.Y.

<http://health.dailynewscentral.com/content/view/0001410/62/>

National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals
July 21, 2005 - CDC releases the most extensive assessment ever made of the exposure of the U.S. population to chemicals in our environment.

The National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals provides an ongoing assessment of the U.S. population's exposure to environmental chemicals using biomonitoring. Biomonitoring is the

assessment of human exposure to chemicals by measuring the chemicals or their metabolites in human specimens such as blood or urine.

This Third Report presents first-time exposure information for the U.S. population for 38 of the 148 chemicals included in the Report. The Report also includes the data from the Second Report; that is, data for 1999-2000.

Download Full Third Report (PDF 3.2MB):

<http://www.cdc.gov/exposurereport/3rd/pdf/thirdreport.pdf>

INFECTIOUS DISEASES NEWS

BIRD FLU

Geographical spread of H5N1 avian influenza in birds - update 28 Situation assessment and implications for human health WHO 18 August 2005

Beginning in late July 2005, official reports to the OIE from government authorities indicate that the H5N1 virus has expanded its geographical range. Both Russia and Kazakhstan reported outbreaks of avian influenza in poultry in late July, and confirmed H5N1 as the causative agent in early August. Deaths in migratory birds, infected with the virus, have also been reported. Outbreaks in both countries have been attributed to contact between domestic birds and wild waterfowl via shared water sources.

These are the first outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza recorded in the two countries. Both countries were previously considered free of the virus.

Since the initial reports, the Russian H5N1 outbreak in poultry, which has remained confined to Siberia, has spread progressively westward to affect 6 administrative regions. In Kazakhstan, several villages bordering the initial outbreak site in Siberia are now known to have experienced disease in poultry. To date, outbreaks in the two countries have involved some large farms as well as small backyard flocks, with close to 120,000 birds dead or destroyed in Russia and more than 9,000 affected in Kazakhstan.

In early August, Mongolia issued an emergency report following the death of 89 migratory birds at two lakes in the northern part of the country. Avian influenza virus type A has been identified as the cause, but the virus strain has not yet been determined. Samples have been shared with WHO reference laboratories and are currently being investigated. Also in early August, an outbreak of H5N1 in poultry was detected in Tibet, China.

In all of these recent outbreaks, authorities have announced control measures in line with FAO and OIE recommendations for highly pathogenic avian influenza. To date, no human cases have been detected, vigilance is high, and rumours are being investigated by local authorities.

http://www.who.int/csr/don/2005_08_18/en/print.html

**Roche Donates Bird Flu Drug to WHO Reserve
Daily News Central 24 August, 2005**

Antivirals, used intensively in an area where a pandemic is emerging and combined with other measures such as quarantine and isolation, could help delay the spread of a virus, according to the World Health Organization. Pharmaceutical company Roche Holding AG is donating 3 million treatment courses of a bird flu drug to a reserve stock managed by the World Health Organization, the UN agency said Wednesday.

The antiviral oseltamivir, known commercially as Tamiflu, is the only treatment proven to be effective in humans against bird flu. WHO would use the reserve stock of the drug to respond quickly to any emerging influenza pandemic if stocks held by national governments were not enough.

"If a flu pandemic were to emerge, these drugs could be flown quickly to the center of a potential pandemic," said WHO chief Dr. Lee Jong-wook. "We urge other countries to help us build up the international stockpile."

Tamiflu could help reduce illness and death and could potentially contain an emerging pandemic virus or slow its spread when combined with other measures, WHO said.

<http://health.dailynewscentral.com/content/view/0001555/31/>

HIV/AIDS

**Study confirms role of meth in HIV: Drug users three times more likely to acquire infection
Rachel Gordon, SAN FRANCISCO Chronicle Staff Writer
Tuesday, August 16, 2005**

People who use crystal methamphetamine are at least three times more likely to be infected with HIV than those who don't use the drug, according to a new government-sponsored study.

"Crystal meth use is the newest and most important threat to the HIV epidemic in the United States," Dr. James Dilley, director of the UC San Francisco AIDS Health Project, said in a prepared statement released Monday.

The study was conducted jointly by researchers for the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UC San Francisco and the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

The study's findings underscore the red flag health officials have been raising about crystal meth: People who use it drop their inhibitions and are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as unprotected sex with multiple partners, that increase the chance of HIV infection.

First reported in the August issue of the medical journal AIDS, the study looked at 3,000 San Franciscans who received anonymous HIV tests in 2000 and 2001.

Of the 300 people in the study who voluntarily reported they used crystal meth, 6 percent had recently been infected with HIV. The infection rate was close to 8 percent for those who admitted to using crystal meth during sexual encounters.

Among respondents who said they had not used meth, 2 percent had recently contracted HIV.

"It is a complicated problem requiring a carefully planned response," Dilley said. "Having doctors, public health officials, policymakers and, most importantly, community members working together is the only means of success."

To that end, said Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, San Francisco's director of Sexually Transmitted Disease Control and senior author of the study, it is essential to combine drug-treatment and drug-prevention programs with efforts to curtail HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, such as syphilis.

"It is important to address crystal use to control those epidemics," Klausner said.

A federal study in five U.S. cities early this year found that new HIV infections among gay and bisexual men in San Francisco were occurring at about half the rate recorded four years ago.

Among a sample of 365 gay men contacted here in bars and dance clubs, sex clubs and gyms, on the streets and in parks and shops, the study found they were becoming infected at a rate of 1.2 percent per year. San Francisco epidemiologists had previously estimated an infection rate of 2.2 percent.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2005/08/16/BAGGPE8CN41.DTL&type=printable>

U.S.-Backed Research Offers New Path to Finding AIDS Cure, August 11, 2005 (Preliminary results support new concept for attacking HIV cells)

U.S. government-funded research has opened a door on a new strategy for research that could lead to a cure for AIDS by eradicating HIV viruses in the body, according to findings reported from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC).

Researchers administered a drug used as an anti-seizure and antidepressant medication to test subjects to attack dormant HIV viruses that can hide in resting immune system cells from drugs now used in highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART). This treatment regimen has been

effective in controlling AIDS symptoms, allowing ongoing management of the disease, but not a cure.

The research, published in The Lancet August 13, found that adding the drug valproate to patients' drug cocktail attacked reservoirs of hidden HIV viruses by targeting an enzyme that allows the virus to become latent.

The study found a 75 percent average decline in latent infection among four test subjects.

"Our findings suggest a new and practical approach to eliminate HIV infection in this persistent reservoir," said Dr. David M. Margolis, the study's senior author and professor of medicine, microbiology and immunology in the School of Medicine at UNC.

Margolis was part of a team from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas when the research was conducted.

The National Institutes of Health and the Veterans Affairs Research Service supported the research.

http://www.usembassy.it/file2005_08/alia/a5081603.htm

**International AIDS Meeting Urges Universal Access to Treatment, July 27, 2005
(WHO, UNAIDS call for long-term solutions, more effective drugs)**

Washington – Health experts from around the world supported the call for universal access to HIV prevention and treatment during the 3rd International AIDS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis and Treatment, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, July 24-27.

The biannual conference brought together leading scientists, public health experts and clinicians to examine the latest scientific developments and continuing challenges in the global response to AIDS.

“As we take emergency actions to ensure universal access to HIV prevention and treatment, we must also establish systems critical to achieving longer-term solutions, such as a vaccine and microbicides,” said Dr. Peter Piot, executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), according to a July 26 press release.

Microbicides are compounds that can be applied to the body to protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. At present, no effective microbicides are available.

“We need to ask if our planning will make a difference in five years – as well as in 20 years,” Piot added.

http://www.usembassy.it/file2005_07/alia/a5072705.htm

AIDS Linked to National Security, New Study Says, July 18, 2005

By Judy Aita, Washington File United Nations Correspondent

New York -- The HIV/AIDS pandemic is affecting the security of states worldwide by weakening economies, government structures, military and police forces and other social structures, according to a new report entitled HIV and National Security: Where are the Links?

The report, authored by Laurie Garrett, senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations, was released July 18.

The scale and geographic scope of the HIV pandemic has only two parallels in recorded history, Garrett said: the "Spanish" flu epidemic that claimed 50 million lives worldwide in 1918-19, and the 14th Century Black Death, which killed more than one-third of the European population in 18 months.

"The only difference is the black death meted out its impact in one and a half to two years in Europe, while HIV -- by the very biological nature of the organism and how it affects the human body -- is doing so over a period of decades," Garrett said at a press conference releasing the report.

Many leading academic investigators, policy analysts, and government officials have disputed the link between HIV/AIDS and a nation's security, Garrett said, in part due to a tendency to define national security in strictly military terms.

Nevertheless, she said, security concerns are integral in dealing with the HIV/AIDS crisis for both poor and wealthy nations, but for different reasons.

http://www.usembassy.it/file2005_07/alia/a5072009.htm

**Building Capacity to Fight HIV/AIDS in Eurasia
CommonHealth Spring 2005**

The Spring 2005 issue of CommonHealth, the periodic journal of the American International Health Alliance (AIHA) focuses on the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the former Soviet Union. Articles delve in to topics including the provision of ART to infants and children, absorptive capacity, orphans due to HIV/AIDS, palliative care, stigma and discrimination, psychosocial support, and providing healthcare services to HIV-positive women.

<http://www.aiha.com/printversion.jsp?t=1124957542014>

OTHER DISEASES

China Reports 4 Cases of Pig-Borne Disease

22 August 2005

By The Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) -- Four people have been infected by a pig-borne disease in China's south and one has died, the government said Monday, one day after an epidemic in another part of the country was declared under control.

...No pigs were reported sickened by *Streptococcus suis*, the bacteria blamed for the human cases, Xinhua said. It wasn't immediately clear how the people were infected, but the disease is usually passed on through contact with raw pork or sick swine. The report did not say if person-to-person transmissions were involved.

...On Sunday, China's ministries of health and agriculture said that an outbreak of the disease in Sichuan province, hundreds of kilometers (miles) northwest of Guangdong, had been brought under control.

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For the Full Article, visit:

<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/international/AP-China-Pig-Disease.html>

Muslims' New Tack on Polio: A Vaccine en Route to Mecca

20 August 2005

By Donald G. McNeil Jr.

Saudi Arabia, which gets millions of visitors each year making their pilgrimage to Mecca, has ordered all young visitors from countries with polio cases to bring proof of vaccination and will vaccinate them again when they arrive, the World Health Organization announced yesterday.

In issuing the order, which applies to everyone under age 15 from 19 countries, the kingdom is moving to stem the global spread of the polio virus, which now affects mainly Muslim countries and regions. Although the next pilgrimage, or hajj, will not reach its peak until early January, the order will take effect as soon as possible.

...Global health experts expressed confidence that the Saudis could stop any spread of the virus in their country, even though at times up to two million pilgrims may be pressed closely together in crowds around the holy sites and in the tent cities and hostels where they will be staying.

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For the Full Article, visit:

<http://nytimes.com/2005/08/20/international/middleeast/20saudi.html>

MISCELLANEOUS

JCAHO To Lead Worldwide Effort on Medical Errors [Aug 24, 2005]

World Health Organization officials on Tuesday announced that the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, which inspects the safety of hospitals, and its affiliate, the Joint Commission International, will head an international effort to reduce medical errors, USA Today reports.

According to a 1999 Institute of Medicine report, 44,000 to 98,000 U.S. residents die annually from medical errors, outpacing deaths related to highway accidents or breast cancer. Under the initiative, medical experts will examine specific safety measures, including determining ways to avoid confusing medications that have similar names; reviewing safe procedures for placing nasogastric tubes, which are threaded through the nose and into the stomach; and establishing "procedures to prevent performing surgery on the wrong body part or even the wrong patient," USA Today reports.

Liam Donaldson, chair of WHO's World Health Alliance for Patient Safety, said hospitals must make it easier for staff members to admit mistakes in order to learn from them. He said, "Human error is inevitable. We can never eliminate it," adding, "We can eliminate problems in the system that make it more likely to happen." Donaldson encouraged the medical industry to look to the aviation industry for ideas to combat medical errors (Szabo, USA Today, 8/24).

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=32210

**Weight Loss Surgery is More Effective Than Diet and Exercise in Helping Severely Obese People Lose Weight
Fact Sheet. RAND August 2005**

The prevalence of obesity in the United States and elsewhere is rising precipitously: A 1999–2002 survey estimated that 30 percent of the U.S. population met the criteria for obesity, a body mass index (BMI — a ratio of weight to height) of 30 or higher (those with a BMI of 40 or over are considered severely obese).[1]

The health consequences of obesity are considerable, yet weight loss of just 5 to 10 percent may lower the risks. The increasing prevalence of obesity has intensified interest in surgical treatments to achieve weight loss, also known as bariatric surgery. These procedures can reduce stomach capacity or adjust intestinal length to restrict food consumption or reduce the calories and nutrients the body can absorb.

With a reported rise in the number of procedures — and complications — researchers at the Southern California Evidence-Based Practice Center, which is funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and housed at RAND, recently examined the effectiveness and risks of this surgery by analyzing nearly 150 published studies, focusing on the most commonly performed procedures.

<http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB9140/>

**Obese Women Receiving Breast Cancer Chemotherapy Are Often Undertreated
Fact Sheet. RAND August 2005**

Obesity both increases the risk for breast cancer and worsens the prognosis for treatment. The increased risk and poorer prognosis have been attributed to physiological factors, including higher blood levels of the hormone estrogen. However, the difference in prognosis — in terms of cancer recurrence and overall survival — between obese[1] women with breast cancer and their healthy-weight counterparts may actually be the result of inadequate doses of chemotherapy. The dosage of most chemotherapeutic drugs is based on the patient's body surface area, determined from weight and height.

Because concerns have been raised about the potential for toxic side effects if chemotherapeutic doses for obese women are increased to account for body weight, some doctors apparently base the doses they give obese women on their ideal weight, even though little evidence exists to support the concerns. By examining the medical files of 9,672 women treated between 1990 and 2001, a newly released study by RAND researchers sought to confirm whether obese women are in fact systematically undertreated for breast cancer.

<http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB9141/>

Serious Sunbathers May Be Tanning Addicts
Daily News Central 16 August, 2005

Researchers classified 26 percent of those interviewed as 'ultraviolet light (UVL) tanning dependent,' using criteria adapted from an alcoholism-screening questionnaire. Why do so many people continue to bake in the sun despite years of skin-cancer warnings from health authorities? It's not that the message has not been received. Many sunbathers know that the ultraviolet rays they're soaking up at the beach or in the tanning salon could endanger their health.

But the behavior persists, and the number of skin-cancer cases continues to rise.

A new study published online in the Archives of Dermatology sheds some light on the problem: Sun tanning may be addictive.

<http://health.dailynewscentral.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=0001505&Itemid=62>

Stem-Cell Breakthrough Could Resolve Moral Dilemma
Daily News Central 22 August, 2005

Stem cells offer great hope for curing degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, and restoring damaged spinal cords. Harvard scientists have announced a breakthrough that could short-circuit the divisive national debate over stem-cell research.

The researchers have pioneered a way of reprogramming adult cells into embryonic stem cells that can replace cells in nerves, tissue and organs lost through disease or accident.

The embryonic stem cells are laboratory grown from existing lines and do not require destroying embryos. That would surmount a principle moral objection to stem-cell research.

<http://health.dailynewscentral.com/content/view/0001545/44/>

Placebo Effect Has Scientific Basis, Study Finds
Written by Rita Jenkins
Daily News Central 23 August, 2005

The 'placebo effect' findings may lead to better use of cognitive, or psychological, therapy for people with chronic pain, the authors suggest. Patients who believe in the effectiveness of their pain medication will experience greater pain relief, finds a new University of Michigan study. Just thinking that a medicine will relieve pain is enough to prompt the brain to release its own natural painkillers, results indicate.

The study, funded by the National Institutes of Health, provides the first concrete evidence that endorphins, the brain's own pain-fighting chemicals, play a direct role in the phenomenon known as the placebo effect.

Endorphins behave similarly to opiate drugs, such as heroin and morphine. They bind to receptors and stop the transmission of pain signals along the nerve pathways. Previous studies have indicated that the brain responds physically during the placebo effect, but the new study is the first to pinpoint a specific mechanism that triggers the brain's physical response.

"This deals another serious blow to the idea that the placebo effect is a purely psychological, not physical, phenomenon," says lead author Jon-Kar Zubieta, MD, PhD, associate professor of psychiatry and radiology at the U-M Medical School and associate research scientist at the Molecular and Behavioral Neurosciences Institute.

The study involved 14 young men who agreed to allow researchers to inject their jaw muscles with a concentrated salt-water solution to induce pain. Brain scans were performed on the subjects to monitor the activity of their brains' natural painkilling endorphins during the process.

<http://health.dailynewscentral.com/content/view/1546/31/>

Study Casts Doubt on Homeopathy Daily News Central 25 August, 2005

To properly evaluate homeopathy, studies are needed that focus on people, not diseases, says a University of Pennsylvania postdoctoral fellow. Homeopathy is based on finding individual, tailored treatments for individual patients. The clinical benefits of homeopathy are little more than a form of the placebo effect, a new study contends.

Homeopathic medicine is an alternative medical system. In homeopathic medicine, there is a belief that "like cures like," meaning that small, highly diluted quantities of medicinal substances are given to cure symptoms, when those same substances given at higher or more concentrated doses would actually cause those symptoms, according to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM).

Practitioners of homeopathy and their patients have always maintained these remedies work because they are true treatments.

<http://health.dailynewscentral.com/content/view/0001558/31/>

Alzheimer's Strikes Daydreaming Part of Brain
Daily News Central 25 August, 2005

'When we muse to ourselves and plan our day and think about the recent past, we tend to use memory systems. Through some as yet unknown pathway or metabolism cascade, use of these systems may be what underlies Alzheimer's disease.' The brain areas involved in daydreaming, musing and other stream-of-consciousness thoughts appear to be the same regions targeted by Alzheimer's disease, researchers are reporting today in an unusual study that offers new insights into the roots of the deadly illness.

The strong correlation between the two suggests there might be a link between the sort of thinking that people regularly do when not involved in purposeful mental activity and the degenerative disease that is characterized by forgetfulness and dementia, scientists who conducted the federally funded study said.

(...)

Randy Buckner, a neuroscientist at Washington University in St. Louis, said the implications of the finding are far from clear. It is too early to suggest that daydreaming is dangerous, he said, or that avoiding such musings could make a difference to the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

Rather, he and others said, the study adds to the evidence that everyday mental and physical activities play an important role in the course of neurological disease.

"It suggests an avenue between brain activity patterns and Alzheimer's disease that we just hadn't been thinking about," Buckner, who led the study, said. "It is going to take some time to understand the relative potential of this link."

<http://health.dailynewscentral.com/content/view/0001556/51/>